

# **Can You Hear Me?**

A Collection of Poetry by Youth  
in California's Court System



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
OF THE COURTS

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CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN  
& THE COURTS

This booklet was produced in 2003 by the Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts in honor of the 100th anniversary of the juvenile court. For additional copies of this booklet, please call 415-865-7739, e-mail [cfcc@jud.ca.gov](mailto:cfcc@jud.ca.gov), or write to the address below:

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It is our great pleasure to present “Can You Hear Me? A Collection of Poetry by Youth in California’s Court System.” This booklet contains a selection of poetry submitted to us as entries in our Children’s Art and Poetry Contest held in 2003 to honor the 100th anniversary of the juvenile court.

The contest was open to youth of any age who have had experience with the court system. We received a tremendous response to the contest and had the difficult task of selecting these few poems to share with you. All of the poems we received were excellent in their own ways, providing a glimpse into the lives of youth in the court system. The selected poems are simply a snapshot of the poetry entries as we tried to include a range of ages, gender, and subjects.

Please note when reading the poems that they have not been edited for spelling or grammatical errors. We felt it was important to present the poems as they were submitted to us.

We express our deepest appreciation for all of the young poets who entered the contest and shared their thoughts and feelings with us. It was a truly enlightening experience for our staff and those who assisted us in selecting the poems for this booklet. We are also exceedingly grateful to the many individuals and court personnel who assisted us in reaching out to the youths and helping them participate in the contest.

We hope you will enjoy the poems in this booklet, and we invite you to share them with others.





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# After Court

**Justin P.**  
**Age 17**

The pain burns.  
Anger is surfacing.  
My jaw aches.  
Tears are pushed back.  
There is no room for air.  
My heart bleeds.  
I feel the defeat ...

The fire has engulfed me.  
My world is torn apart.  
I await that helping hand ...

I tolerate the evils.  
I try to be content.  
I do my best to please.  
I try to live life to its fullest.  
I accept my punishments.  
I take responsibility.  
I keep that smile on my face.  
I love and am loved ...

“Minor Justin P. is currently serving a 120-day commitment for violation of probation related to alcohol use. His mother and father are long-term users, and his grandfather, with whom he has lived for the past few years, has given up on him and cut all ties. Justin has no idea where he will go upon release; he will be just shy of his 18th birthday. He has suffered many setbacks in his life, all the while keeping a positive outlook on the future. As you can see by his writings, he is filled with hope of a better tomorrow. He is sensitive and uses his writing to express his inner feelings in a positive way.” —Juvenile Hall staff

# Invisible

Johnny T.  
Age 17

If I had one wish in life  
To have a special power  
I would be invisible

I would go where I want  
Do what I please  
I would be free

Free from worry  
Free from hatred  
Free from fear itself

I would run without looking back  
Only present and future lies ahead  
Run without a trace  
No one to follow me

If I was invisible  
I would be able to live in  
A world where I can just be me

“Johnny is a 17 year old resident of the Sacramento County Boys Ranch. He was committed to the boys ranch for possession of a concealed firearm and possession of marijuana for sale. He has one prior offense for burglary.”  
—Johnny’s probation officer

# Night Time

David C.  
Age unknown

Incarcerated by my own thoughts.  
I try to escape this place of hate but can't.  
I feel all hope is lost.  
I'm sending prayers to the one on the cross.  
Can you help me?  
Because I want to do right but at night I turn and toss.  
Trying to sleep off this drunkness of sorrow  
While thinking bout the past  
I'm living in the present trying to plan for tomorrow.  
But as I lay in this silence, only young felons breathing.  
I hear myself inside my heart and mind yelling and screaming.  
I wish I could stay asleep and dreaming.  
But awake to reality.  
My life is a nightmare where I fight for my sanity.  
How long will this go on?  
My hearts been torn.  
Ripped up, stitched up  
Since the day I was born.

David is in the delinquency system in Sacramento County.



# Changed

**Jacob B.**  
**Age 16**

I live in darkness  
I live without hope  
I let life control me  
That's how I live  
Changed  
I now live in the light  
I'm full of hope  
I control my life  
That's how I'm living  
Knowledge is the door  
You are the key  
Inside that door there's a door of success  
Inside that door there's life  
The key fits all

It was October 5, 2002 and I was sweating in the waiting room. The room was filled with a bunch of guys like myself al waiting for their judgment. I was getting anxious as the Sheriff came in and called peoples names. Then the Sheriff cam in and called out my name, I was relieved and scared at the same time. As I walked through the big brown doors and sat down in the cold metal chair, the judge came out of her chambers. The Judge told me, "instead of wasting mind and your time I'm going to sentence you to Camp Glenwood." The District Attorney agreed and a few days later I was on my way to Camp Glenwood.

# Court

**Jusheem W.**  
**Age 16**

Heart pounding  
My legs are weak  
I feel like I can't walk  
Head Hurts  
Feels like somebody is pushing down  
on both sides of my head.  
Wondering if my family is waiting  
Wondering if I will get to go home  
Waiting for me to be called in  
Waiting to be judged  
I will never get to go home  
I will never get out of here  
Im going to be here forever

Jusheem is in the delinquency system in San Mateo County.

# Not Another Day

Chris W.  
Age 16

My life to this day,  
has been wasted away.  
A life that no one should have to live,  
not even for one day.  
I've listened to you  
now hear what I say  
I will not live that life  
not even for another day  
starting today I am a changed man  
I am gonna live a productive life  
the best that I can  
I'll never come to this place again  
because I'm sick of livin a life of sin.  
My life will never again waste away  
not for a month, a week, not even another day.

# To Mom

**Carrie M.**  
**Age 11**

Love is patient  
Love is kind  
Love is something  
Some people don't find  
Love will be with you  
Everywhere you go  
Love is something  
Some people don't know  
Love is something  
That will stay with you  
Love is something  
Some people can't get to  
Love is something  
That is true  
Love is something  
For me and you

"Carrie and her brother were wards of the court several years ago due to alcoholism and domestic violence in the home. They were only in foster care for a short time and were returned to the home as the father was in jail and later went to a 90 day rehabilitation program. I cooperated with all the requests of the court and full custody of the children was returned."—Carrie's Mom

# Needles

**Kasey C.**  
**Age unknown**

the sounds ✧ the rush ✧ the pain ✧ the thrill ✧ the high ✧ nauseatingly wonderful ✧  
waking up without even being asleep ✧ with bruises, dark, painful, and purple, Running  
down my arm ✧ not knowing where the time went ✧ Still not knowing what I did to  
pass the time ✧ It suffocates me ✧ An issue ... ✧ It was sweet relief from all my  
nightmares ✧ Yet it all felt like a hazy dream ✧ Seeing things through cloudy eyes ✧  
Made it impossible to feel the pain on the inside ✧ Impossible to see clearly, the girl I  
was becoming on the inside ✧ So dingy ✧ So dirty ✧ So skinny ✧ So ... nauseating

Kasey is in the delinquency system in Fresno County.

# Innocent Child

Chandra P.  
Age 16

I was just an innocent child lying in my bed  
Not knowing you were lurking and danger was ahead.  
I can feel your presence, you're right in my room,  
All I can hope and wish for is that mommy wakes up soon.  
You touch me all over my body, my feet, my legs,  
and my thighs. You tell me you'll buy me what ever I want  
But I know there bold face lies  
You touch me all over, caress my body and  
grab a hold of my face,  
You do this without a trace, without a trace of guilt  
for what you're doing to me  
Taking my innocence and my virginity  
You know what you've done to me is not fair,  
As you leave my room I feel naked and bare,  
I wait in my room so frigid and scared, and feeling like a fool.  
When morning comes I run to my school.  
I tell my teacher all about you.  
She calls up a number I hope its not you,  
I'm scared, really scared I don't know what to do.  
The police come and they take me away, they say in a group  
home is where I must stay.

They take me to court to place you in jail,  
They say people like you belong in hell. I see you looking at  
me as I testify,  
I stutter as I talk, I think I'm gonna cry. I look at my mother  
who also looks scared,  
I can't handle this place, I can no longer bare.  
And when I am done they say that its all over,  
My mother hugs me softly as she cries on my shoulder  
For she knows that I am not coming home  
And I realized that's when I started my journey alone.  
Eleven years in the system with a sick pathetic dad,  
I miss the home that I once had.  
But I know it was for the best, I'm doing well in school not  
really good in math.  
I know great things are out there,  
I must continue the path.

# Visiting

Amber  
Age 15

When ever I look into their eyes  
I can't seem to stop the loving stare  
I can't bring myself to say the words  
To say how much I really care  
I put my hands over my face  
I always hold my feelings in  
I don't know what I will say when I see them again  
Or when I can say those words again  
To tell them all my love for them  
The last time I even told them  
What they mean to me  
They put their hands over mine  
And told me they stand by my side  
I am afraid to speak those words again  
For fear they'll lose their delight  
Today may even be the last time  
I may get to see their faces shine  
Their happy faces bring me delight  
I finally think that I am prepared  
To say the words I want to say  
I just hope the words don't slip away



I know my mom will probably cry  
My dad and I will both ask why  
My mom will only simply sigh  
It seems we've just begun our "Hi's"  
I see it's time for our good-bye's

"My name is Amber and I have been here at Juvenile Hall San Bernardino for almost three weeks now. So far I am doing very well. I have been rehabilitated from my drug addiction, and I have taken the Lord as my savior. I am not yet finished with court and I am really scared. I am here for a crime I did not commit; the sentence for that crime is life. My whole family is behind me 100%, but they are all scared for me also. I am grateful for my time here to give me a full recovery but I hope the truth is found soon so I may go home. My poem relates to my current visiting experiences with my parents. It is always hard for us knowing I may never see home again, but we pray every night and have faith that it will all go well. Until I return home, I will continue to do my best and have these visits every Wednesday evening."

# A Home

by Andy W.  
Age 13

A Home is not a window  
A tile nor a wall

A Home is not a dorm  
With rooms down a hall

A Home is what we make it  
From the inside out

A Home is where we stand  
Where we live, make things work out.

“This poem has changed my outlook on where I’ve lived in the last few months. I learned from my experiences in writing this poem that if you are happy where you live than that is your home. For a clearer example, in my court experiences I have had 3 homes the foster home I lived in, Yellow Brick Homes in Santa Rosa, and Full Circle in Bolinas. I know these will always be a place of my spirit body and mind.”

# Never Explained

Christina H.  
Age 17

I don't know what it was  
that made me change my ways  
but all of a sudden I got caught up  
and I would disappear for days

I was out on the streets  
always doing something wrong  
kickin it with my homies  
is where I thought I belonged

I never thought about who I hurt  
or about my family sitting at home  
I just remember that aching memory  
of everyday feeling alone

Eventually it caught up to me  
and now here I sit in jail  
hoping that I get another chance  
so my life I will not fail.

I started to fall but, I caught myself  
and I brought myself back home  
so I can learn to feel loved  
and no more memories of being so alone.

Christina is in the delinquency system in Orange County.

# I Wonder As I Wander

Kristin L.  
Age 15

I wonder as i wander out under the sky why do people i care about always have to die. Are happy where you are wherever that may be. I wonder as I wander do you still think of me.

Is it nice up there in heaven for i know you made it there. Are the clouds made out of marshmallows do you know that I still care.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky why do people I care about always have to die.

“The piece that I have written is dedicated to two very beautiful people who have passed on and are no longer hurting. My grandfather whom I was living with when I had nowhere else in the world to go. He had lung cancer from smoking and died in my grandmother’s arms. We no longer have the best relationship and I don’t live with her anymore. I moved around to 36 out of home placements and met a wonderful lady (Mary Taylor) who works at Edmund D. Edelman Children’s Court. Well, her husband died and she’s not able to see me as much anymore but I want her to know she’s took all the bitterness out of me and has me looking to the lord all the time.”

# If I Would Have

**Marco Z.**  
**Age unknown**

If I would have listened to my parents,  
I wouldn't have become a criminal.  
If I would have gone to school,  
I would have had my diploma.  
If I wouldn't have committed a crime,  
I wouldn't be doing time.  
If I would have just done my time  
smooth and calm  
I would have been home planning my time.  
If I would have dreamed of coming to a place where the light don't shine,  
Then I would have stayed in a place where I am the light to give my life the sunshine.

Marco is in the delinquency system in Sacramento County.

# I Want to Be Adopted

**Chella N.**  
**Age 13**

I want to be adopted  
Because I wanted a mom  
I went to Adoption Fairs  
But I didn't meet anybody  
That I would want to live with  
For the rest of my life  
I thought about  
How much I would miss my family  
I used to think that I would get  
To live with my mom again  
But I never got to  
My sister is already adopted  
And she likes it just fine  
Now I just don't know  
What I should do

"Chella did not officially enter DCS [Department of Children's Services] until the age of 5 even though reports had been made earlier on the family. From that time until age 12, she lived a few months with a relative, a group home, and 2 foster homes. About the time she was 10 an adopted home was sought. Chella went to one adoption fair and inquiries were made but, none that Marin County workers felt were right. I became aware of Chella in the fall of 2001. After 2 visits to California and a Christmas visit from Chella, we both knew that we were meant to be a family. I brought Chella home to Tennessee on March 11, 2002. Our adoption was finalized March 11, 2003. Today Chella is a wonderful part of our family. She has many friends, makes honor roll in school, and is active in band and in church. Chella is my precious gift from God."—Chella's Mom

# This Little Girl

**Kassie O.**

**Age 16**

She needs your hand  
She is so confused  
She doesn't know  
Where she is or where she is going  
She doesn't know if this is all just a dream  
She needs your hand she needs it so  
She needs your hand to grasp and lead her  
You can't begin to understand  
What this little girl is going through  
She needs your help to know what love is  
She was told that she didn't love herself  
She is lost in this heart  
This heart that is broken  
She can't see what is going on  
With these feelings inside  
She needs your hand to grasp  
To tell her everything will be all right

# Four Walls

Jessica

Age 15

I'm put in a room all alone  
Four walls is all I can see  
It is so quiet, I'm falling asleep.

Its time to wake up  
I don't want to wake up  
I know I'll be in the same world  
The world where I can't be free,  
The world that won't let me be.

Some days I can't tell if it's day or night  
I wish to break through these walls just like a knight  
Cast a spell  
To change my crime  
To go to heaven and not to hell

Tomorrow is judgment day  
I just hope to get out of this inside world  
I feel like a caged bird  
The one that sings but can't be heard

Sometimes I have wild thoughts;  
To fly over skies and to have wings  
I know all those things are impossible  
Impossible to reach specially for a girl like me

My mom and dad must be ashamed  
They probably forgot all about me and pretend  
to not hear my name  
And because all of this I'm the blame



I can't stand tall  
And I can't have a good sleep  
Everything is fading  
And I can't even eat.

Please unlock this door  
I'll get on my knees if I have to and drop to the floor  
Just let me out I promise to be good  
I'm going to get sick I hate this food

Again I'm put in a room all alone  
Four walls is all I can see  
And if I could break through  
I will set every one free.

"I'm just about to turn sixteen years old, and I'm in Juvenile Hall (San Bernardino) before I go on my name is Jessica my birthday is on November 9 in Santa Ana California. When I got arrested I felt the whole world fell on top of me. My hopes and dreams I thought were put away. Well let me get to the point, I am in a one women-cell because of a crime that I did not intend to do. When anger gets to you and reaches the last nerve of your body, expect the unexpected. I have three felonies and some charges pressed on me. I am scared to face my parents; I am making them pay for something that they didn't commit. But some day and some way I will pay them back. On June 11, 2003 at 9:45 a.m. I had court. I will be out in a while, and till then I will remain patient. I am a very good student, I attended Colton High School, I played for the girls basketball team at my high school. Well, let me begin by telling you how jail changed my life, forever. I can't go back to my old school; I can't be put in a regular high school. My parents are disappointed, and I bet my little brothers and sisters are too. I know I have been a very bad example for them. But when they are old enough to understand I will tell them my mistake. Hope you will enjoy my poem, and remember my name because one day I will publish a book of my own."

# Behind Walls

Ruben V.  
Age unknown

Endless days that count the years,  
No longer can I hold back my tears.  
Serving time behind a wall  
With no one to visit, no one to call.

Like a wild animal locked inside a gate  
Waiting patiently for my parole date.  
No reason to feel any sorrow.  
All I do is pray for tomorrow.

Then one day the gates will open wide,  
That boy that's now a man steps outside.  
As he leaves he looks behind,  
Seeing the same wall holding his own kind.

The broken promises, the empty dreams,  
The sorrow is stitched between the seams.

Ruben is in placement at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility in San Joaquin County.

# It's All Right to Cry

E. A.

Age unknown

A trickle of water in my eyes  
Not a soul knows the reason why  
The reason is not hidden, no surprise  
Seems forbidden to find why the trickle arrives,

I get a lump in my throat and I try  
To hold back my trickle so they can't see me cry  
It's not going to happen to myself I lie  
Only fooling my being, trying to easily get by

My eyes burn from holding back my affection  
But I need to learn that sometimes tears are my protection  
I try so hard to make some spiritual connections  
And the harder I try, the more I hurt in different sections

Now I've held back so long, it seems impossible to let go  
Every one cry's even the strong, why can't I, I don't know  
I don't want to hold back no more, let them show  
But no matter how hard I try the tears won't flow

I believe it will help, I won't deny  
I want to kiss my old feeling a long good bye  
At least I could say this before I die  
I finally realized it was all right to cry

E.A. is in the delinquency system in San Joaquin County.



We would like to thank the youth who entered the art and poetry contest. We are also grateful to Ms. Patricia Foster, Mrs. Barbara George, Dr. Ronald Hulbert, and Dr. Jeanette Wiener for their recommendations to the selection committee in choosing the poetry for this booklet.

The artwork on the cover of this booklet was created by Jamie C., age 12, while visiting the children's waiting room in the Superior Court of Riverside County. The painting is titled "Flower Among Leaves."

